

Message Text

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ORIGIN PA-02

INFO OCT-01 SS-15 PRS-01 ISO-00 CCO-00 SSO-00 NSC-05

NSCE-00 INR-07 /031 R

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APPROVED BY PA/M::WJDYESS

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P 252034Z AUG 75 ZFF4

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: SOPN, XF, PFOR

SUBJECT: PRESS MATERIAL

1. HERewith FULL TEXT GODFREY SPERLING JR. ARTICLE, MONDAY, AUGUST 25, CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR, HEADLINED "WILL US GET SUCKED INTO THE MIDEAST?"

2. ANYONE WHO KEEPS A CLOSE EYE ON PUBLIC OPINION THESE DAYS HAS TO KNOW ONE THING FOR CERTAIN: THAT THE AMERICAN PEOPLE ARE UTTERLY OPPOSED TO BEING DRAWN INTO A WAR.

3. THIS IS NOT A SURPRISING DISCLOSURE. MOST PERSONS PROBABLY WOULD ASSUME THAT THIS ANTIWAR SENTIMENT IS WIDELY PREVALENT IN THE WAKE OF THE VIETNAM DISASTER. BUT WE HAVE BEEN SURPRISED IN OUR SAMPLINGS OF OPINION TO FIND HOW STRONGLY PEOPLE FEEL ON THIS ISSUE.

4. IT IS AGAINST THIS BACKDROP THAT ONE FINDS A GROWING CONCERN IN THIS CITY THAT THE USE OF UNITED STATES CITIZENS

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TO MONITOR A MIDEAST SETTLEMENT--SHOULD IT COME ABOUT--

COULD WELL BE THE VERY ELEMENT THAT MIGHT PULL THE U.S. INTO ANOTHER WAR.

5. THE PRESIDENT AND HIS SECRETARY OF STATE ARE ARGUING THAT THE USE OF SUCH CIVILIANS WOULD NOT BE A US INVOLVEMENT THAT MIGHT LEAD TO A LATER US TROOP COMMITMENT ON THE SIDE OF ISRAEL. WHEN ASKED WHETHER THIS MIGHT NOT COME ABOUT, A HIGH U.S. OFFICIAL ANSWERED, "THAT IS OUT OF THE QUESTION."

6. WHAT WOULD THE U.S. DO IF THE U.S. CIVILIANS BECAME ENDANGERED? THE OFFICIAL GAVE A MOST UNSATISFACTORY ANSWER, INDICATING THAT THE AMERICANS MIGHT BE LEFT TO SHIFT FOR THEMSELVES. "WE WOULD NEED HUGE FORCES THERE IN ORDER TO BE ABLE TO PROTECT THEM," HE SAID.

7. BUT, A QUESTIONER ASKED, WASN'T THERE STILL AN UNSPOKEN ADMINISTRATION ASSUMPTION IN EVERYTHING IT IS DOING IN THE MIDEAST THAT THE U.S. WOULD GO TO WAR TO DEFEND ISRAEL'S EXISTENCE? THE OFFICIAL REPLIED THAT THE POSITION HAD NEVER BEEN FORMALLY STATED, BUT THAT FIVE ADMINISTRATIONS HAVE PROTECTED ISRAEL. HE SAID THE U.S. WOULD GIVE ISRAEL MINIMUM ARMS FOR SURVIVAL, ADDING: "SURVIVAL OF ISRAEL IS A BASIC AMERICAN POLICY."

8. HOW FAR WOULD THE U.S. GO IN ITS POLICY OF SUPPORT OF ISRAEL? THE OFFICIAL SAID, "WE ARE NOT FACING THE QUESTION OF WHETHER AMERICANS WILL GO TO WAR. WE ARE AIDING OTHERS TO DEFEND THEMSELVES."

9. BUT WHAT IF AT SOME POINT THE ARABS DO ATTACK THROUGH ISRAELI LINES WHICH THE U.S. IS COMMITTED TO PROTECT? AND WHAT IF ISRAEL ISN'T ABLE TO BEAT BACK THE ATTACK?

10. THAT'S WHAT IS WORRYING A LOT OF PEOPLE HERE, PARTICULARLY THOSE WHO SEE THE USE OF U.S. CIVILIANS IN SINAI AS ALMOST INVITING U.S. TROOP INVOLVEMENT TO PROTECT THESE CIVILIANS. THEY FORESEE THE POSSIBILITY OF ANOTHER MAYAGUEZ RESCUE MISSION. OR--THE UNTHINKABLE THOUGHT--

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THEY SEE THE POSSIBILITY OF THE U.S. BEING DRAWN INTO WHAT COULD BE FAR WORSE THAN ANOTHER VIETNAM. THEY ENVISION THE POSSIBILITY OF A CONFRONTATION BETWEEN THE U.S. AND THE SOVIET UNION.

11. THERE IS A FURTHER AND RELATED ANXIETY HERE--AND THAT HAS TO DO WITH THE PRESIDENT'S APPARENT INTEREST IN LETTING ALL POSSIBLE ENEMIES KNOW THAT THE U.S. HAS NOT RULED

OUT THE "FIRST-STRIKE" USE OF ATOMIC WEAPONS.

12. THIS RATTLING OF ATOMIC WEAPONS CAME THROUGH CLEARLY IN A COMMENT MADE BY SECRETARY OF DEFENSE JAMES SCHLESINGER TO A GROUP OF REPORTERS RECENTLY. HE SAID:

13. "FIRST USE COULD CONCEIVABLY, LET ME UNDERSCORE CONCEIVABLY, INVOLVE WHAT WE DEFINE AS STRATEGIC FORCES AND POSSIBLY, UNDERSCORE POSSIBLY, INVOLVE A SELECTIVE STRIKE AT THE SOVIET UNION. WE DO NOT NECESSARILY EXCLUDE THAT BUT IT IS INDEED A VERY, VERY LOW PROBABILITY."

14. MR. SCHLESINGER WAS OBVIOUSLY TRYING TO DOWNPLAY THE RATTLE--BUT THE THREAT WAS CLEARLY THERE.

15. NO ONE SEEMS TO HAVE ANSWERS TO WHAT THESE HINTS ABOUT THE USE OF ATOMIC WEAPONS MIGHT MEAN. BUT THERE IS THIS BURNING QUESTION:

16. IS THE ADMINISTRATION TALKING ABOUT, AND PERHAPS THREATENING, THE USE OF ATOMIC ARMS IN THE MIDDLE EAST--INSTEAD OF TROOPS?

17. AGAIN--NO ONE SEEMS TO HAVE THE ANSWER TO WHAT MANY THINK IS A TROUBLING QUESTION. (END TEXT) INGERSOLL

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: TOSEC, PRESS COMMENTS, ARBITRATION, POLITICAL SETTLEMENT, NUCLEAR WEAPONS DEPLOYMENT
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 25 AUG 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: n/a
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: n/a
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment:
Disposition Date: 01 JAN 1960
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975STATE201897
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: JCHAMBERLAIN:JC
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750293-1097
From: STATE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750820/aaaaarqu.tel
Line Count: 140
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ORIGIN PA
Original Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: n/a
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: hartledg
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 10 FEB 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <10 FEB 2003 by ReddocGW>; APPROVED <27 JAN 2004 by hartledg>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
06 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: PRESS MATERIAL
TAGS: SOPN, PFOR, MNUC, MPOL, XF, US, (STERLING, GODREY JR)
To: SECRETARY
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 06 JUL 2006